

The Main Objectives of Normative Religious Pluralism in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an (and as shown in the previous chapter), normative religious pluralism is not regarded as mere toleration of other faiths, but rather a divine law, or *sunnah ilāhiyyah*. Thus, according to the Qur'an, implementation of normative religious pluralism is a necessary process for human peace and prosperity. Conversely, transgression of its requirements inevitably leads to tension and hate. This transgression can take many forms, one of the most critical pertaining to objectives. So, for instance, by moving objectives of religious pluralism away from their universal terrestrial basis to exclusive eschatological polemics and accusation, transgression results. Objectives can also be manipulated to serve interests contradicting humanitarian aims. Thus, according to Amarah, certain participants in the religious pluralism process tend to use it as a political tool to gain influence and power in the Muslim world.¹ In similar fashion, the objectives of religious pluralism can also be directed toward realizing certain ends, in this case religious dilution in order to underpin modern liberalist theory (as would seem to be the case with John Hick, whose classic theory of religious pluralism

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focuses on epistemological principles rather than religious tenets²). On the other hand, the objectives of normative religious pluralism can be reduced from their universal nature to an exclusive interpretation of principles focusing on one particular religious group, as in the case of some Qur'anic exegetical sources. These problematic areas pose a potential threat to the whole process of interfaith relations. As Altwaijri rightly remarks:

If inter-religious coexistence, which is at the same time coexistence among cultures and civilizations, is not geared to the service of lofty humanitarian goals, it will lose its fine edge. It will become more akin to propagandist moves and empty slogans than sincere actions aimed to better the life of modern man.³

This chapter will therefore explore the main objectives of normative religious pluralism in the Qur'an to hence shed light on whether these objectives are exclusively limited to a certain religious group or are inclusively humanitarian. Of course we can derive many secondary objectives of religious pluralism from the Qur'anic text, since religious commonality is a vast field for the promotion of valuable goals in interfaith relations. However, closely scrutinising the Qur'an, it would appear that four main objectives of normative religious pluralism are essential to the peacebuilding process:

1. **Knowledge of the other.** This objective signifies the need for mutual understanding mentioned in the Qur'an under the notion of *ta'aruf*.
2. **Cooperation with the other.** This objective signifies the need for mutual engagement, *ta'awun*, in the process of religious pluralism.
3. **Competing with the other in good works.** This objective signifies the need for mutual contribution mentioned in the Qur'an by the phrase *Fastabiqū al-khayrāt*.
4. **Mutual support.** This is mentioned in the Qur'an as *tadāfu'*,

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and mainly signifies the need for mutual support against oppression.

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Knowledge of the Other: Mutual Understanding – *Ta'āruf*

The significance of knowing the other emerges largely from human nature being relaxed in the company of what is known and familiar, and fearing and keeping distant from what is unknown and unfamiliar. Accordingly, Asani concludes that the reason for religious conflict and transgression of religious pluralism “is not so much a clash of civilizations as it is a clash of ignorances.”⁴ In fact, ignorance of the other seems to pose a threat not only to religious coexistence, but also to the coexistence of cultures and civilisations alike. For this reason, the Qur'an defines knowledge of the other as the purpose of creation, both in terms of biological and social diversity. In this respect the Qur'an states the following:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (Qur'an *al-Hujurat* 49:13)

What is the historical context of this verse and how is it linked to the objective of knowing the other? As no authentic occasion exists for its revelation, we need to examine the place of its revelation to thus understand the circumstances in which it was revealed and so understand its meaning. Commentators on the Qur'an regard all the surah to have been revealed in Madinah. However, some scholars maintain the revelation to have been Makkan, since the verse starts with the phrase “O mankind!” a recognisable sign of Makkan chapters. Nevertheless, al-Zarkashī classifies the whole of surah *al-Hujurat* as being Madinan.⁵

There is also an opinion from Ibn ‘Abbas of this thirteenth verse of the Madinan surah as having been revealed in Makkah. Methodologically speaking, it is unfeasible to assume that Makkan verses could exist in Madinan chapters. This is because during the revelation, Qur’anic verses were arranged in special units called chapters or surahs (*suwar*). Assuming a Makkan verse to exist in a Madinan surah, would imply that the verse had been revealed in Makkah and not arranged in any surahs, remaining in isolation pending revelation of its future surah in Madinah. The most dangerous implication of this notion is that the arrangement of a certain Makkan verse into its proper place in a Makkan surah would have had to have been forgotten thus requiring its insertion later in Madinah into a relevant Madinan surah. In contrast, however, we are very likely to come across Madinan verses existing in Makkan origin surahs as a result of the *hijrah* (migration to Madinah). Meaning that a surah is said to be of Makkan origin when its beginning was revealed in the Makkan phase, even if it contains verses from Madinah where it was completed during the Madinan phase following the migration.⁶ In addition, it is inaccurate to regard a verse commencing with the phrase “O mankind!” as always signifying a surah to be Makkan in origin, since the same phrase also exists in surahs unanimously accepted as Madinan (i.e. *al-Baqarah* and *al-Nisā’*).

Given these arguments the clear conclusion is that the entire surah is a Madinan one. Also untenable is the statement that verse 49:13 originated in Makkah and was later arranged into a Madinan surah.

In point of fact, the verse is entirely conducive to a Madinan environment in terms of the objective of knowing the other. Unlike the homogeneous nature of Makkan society, Madinah was multicultural, with *ahl al-kitāb* coexisting alongside the local groups. For this reason, the migration from Makkah to Madinah is very often illustrated as being a migration from a tribal mentality to one of multiculturalism. However, there seems to have been a gap between the existence of diversity as a

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fact in Madinan society and human perception towards such a phenomenon.

Historically speaking, the consensus among pre-Islamic Arabs was that differences among people lead to a hierarchical social order based on those differences. In this respect, commenting on the above verse, Ibn Ashur remarks that:

It was common among Arab tribes, before Islam, to claim superiority and domination over the other. It was to the extent that a Bedouin was asked whether he would agree to become a *Bāhili*⁷ and as a reward he would enter Paradise. The Bedouin remained thinking and then answered: "I would agree providing that the inhabitants of Paradise would never know I was a *Bāhili*." Such wrong perception of diversity had led to animosity and continuous wars between those people.⁸

Therefore, clear misconception prevailed with regards to the purpose of diversity. Built on the assumption that differences constructed social hierarchy, the phenomenon of diversity was perceived as a reason for social inequalities. This was the historical condition in which verse 40:13 was revealed. Although a multicultural society, the approach followed was still exclusive. The revelation of verse 49:13 in this historical context, changed the mindset instilling a new perception of diversity and its purpose. In fact, the Qur'an advanced the idea that the objective of co-existence is not to seek superiority and domination over different people, but to reach mutual understanding by knowing each other.

Having established a correlation between the objective of knowing the other and the historical circumstances of the verse's revelation, we next examine the textual context in which the verse occurs to investigate relevant thematic relationships between the objective of knowing the other and the textual context of the verse. In order to do so, it is important to define first the topical unity of surah *al-Hujurat*.

The definition of topical unity in Qur'anic exegesis is a process based on reasoning. Because of this, different definitions

and opinions may exist with regard to the topical unity of a certain Qur'anic surah. However, as long as these definitions and opinions are in accordance with the whole textual context of the surah in question, they are likely to be accepted despite their multiplicity.

In the case of *al-Ḥujurāt*, Qutub defines its topical unity as follows: "It [*al-Ḥujurāt*] lays down, almost independently, a complete sketch of a noble world, free of anything that may be described as unbecoming."⁹ In a similar way, Hijazi states that the surah revolves around the idea of achieving a high standard of morality.¹⁰ Therefore, the surah's topical unity can be summarised as the achievement of a noble world based on a high standard of purity, purity of conscience as well as purity of behavior.

The second thematic step is to explore the relationship between the topical unity of achieving a noble world and the objective of knowing the other. In this respect, the textual context of the surah criticises and disapproves of behavior adopted on the basis of ignorance and suspicion towards others. According to surah *al-Ḥujurāt*, there is a possibility that people can be harmed out of ignorance. Thus, in order to avoid such damage, the Qur'an orders believers to investigate any given information as well as to determine the accuracy of that information before adopting a negative attitude towards others. The Qur'an states:

O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done. (Qur'an *al-Ḥujurāt* 49:6)

Verification of the truth of what people may say or do requires accurate knowledge of those people, otherwise wrong and harmful accusations might occur. Consequently, lack of knowledge might lead to the adoption of negative attitudes towards the other. Such attitudes might manifest themselves in the form of ridicule, defamation, negative assumption, spying

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and backbiting. In fact, all these forms of communication are prohibited in the following verses of *al-Ḥujurāt*:

O ye who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others: It may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): Nor let some women laugh at others: It may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): Nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames: Ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used of one) after he has believed: And those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong.

O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it...But fear Allah. For Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. (Qur'an *al-Ḥujurāt* 49:11-12)

According to al-Biqā'ī, there exists a relationship between God's command to verify information given concerning people and the avoidance of all negative attitudes mentioned above.¹¹ In the same way, Ibn Ashur argues that it was the lack of realisation that the purpose of diversity was to learn to know one another, that led pre-Islamic Arabs to live in a state of animosity, warfare, ridicule, defamation, negative assumption, spying, and backbiting.¹²

Therefore, the achievement of a noble world (the topical unity of *al-Ḥujurāt*), seems to be directly related to the objective of knowing the other. Thus, there appears to be thematic relevance between the textual context of the surah and the objective of mutual acquaintance (*ta'āruf*). This thematic relevance is found in the negative consequences which emerge as a result of a wrong perception of diversity and ignorance of the other.

Another context which plays a significant role in understanding verse 49:13 is the current civilisational condition. In this age of globalisation, the question of the objectives of religious pluralism takes central position while reflecting on verse 49:13. So, it is methodologically important, in the case of Qur'anic exegesis,

to take into consideration the context of the reality in which a certain Qur'anic verse is interpreted.¹³

To demonstrate the importance of the civilisational context for understanding the objective of knowing the other, it seems relevant to present both the classical and modern interpretations of the verse:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes [*shu'ūb* and *qabā'il*], that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (Qur'an *al-Hujurat* 49:13)

Studying Ibn 'Abbās' commentary on the verse we find only three words explaining the words *shu'ūb* and *qabā'il*. Al-Bukhārī narrates that Ibn 'Abbās explained the meaning of *shu'ūb* as *qabā'il* 'izām, the broadest category of lineage, as he explained the meaning of *qabā'il* as *buṭūn*, tribal sub-districts.¹⁴ Mujāhid in his commentary on the verse, adds only one sentence to Ibn 'Abbās' statement, this being that the goal of human division into *shu'ūb* and *qabā'il* is to know people's line of descent.¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī also provide very limited commentary on the verse restricting the meaning of *ta'āruf* to people's descent.¹⁶ A close scrutiny of al-Rāzī's commentary on the verse reveals that he limits the meaning and implications of it only to believers and excludes "unbelievers." Al-Rāzī claims that "the verse comes as an explanation and confirmation of the previous verses [prohibiting ridicule and backbiting]". However, in the case of "unbelievers," "it is permissible to treat them with ridicule and backbite due to their [wrong] religion and faith."¹⁷ Another reason for al-Rāzī's exclusive view on the verse is that the verse addresses the issue of social equality. Yet, according to him, unbelievers cannot be categorised as equal to believers, since "an unbeliever and a believer are two incompatible sorts; an unbeliever is inanimate lower than animals, whereas a believer

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is what is meant by being human.”¹⁸ Finally, al-Rāzī mentions that the verse contains the phrase “the most honored of you” (49:13), but “there is not any honor for an unbeliever since he/she is lower than animals and more humiliated than vermin.”¹⁹

Thus in the classical sources of Qur'anic exegesis we find limited and exclusive interpretations of the verse such that deriving from it a humanistic approach in terms of knowing the other in a process of religious pluralism is not recognised. But these interpretations are largely the product of their time, the historical context and circumstances being such that societies were predominantly homogeneous, divided by cultural boundaries, and surrounded by religious wars. As was the case in al-Rāzī's lifetime.

Turning to some modern sources of Qur'anic exegesis with regards to verse 49:13, it becomes apparent that the current civilisational context has played an important role in underlining the objective of knowing the different other. By adopting a humanistic approach, some modern exegetes have demonstrated a new understanding of the verse. For instance, Qutub remarks that the purpose of making people into nations and tribes is not so that they “stir up conflict and enmity. It is rather for the purpose of getting to know one another and living peacefully together.”²⁰ Moreover, Qutub states that through such a purpose “Islam establishes its human global system under God's banner alone.”²¹ Even though this statement appears controversial in terms of its meaning, it is a fact that Qutub, unlike classical sources, defines knowledge of the other and thus realization of a peaceful life as a purpose of diversity. Another striking expression in Qutub's comment is the phrase “human global system” which according to him, must rest on the Oneness of God.

Similarly, Ibn Ashur states that the wisdom of diversity is people knowing one another at different social levels starting from the level of the family and reaching to that of civilisations.²² However, what is more significant to note is that Ibn Ashur relates the purpose of knowing the other to human nature. He observes that perceived as a reason for a mutual understanding,

diversity comes in accordance with human nature, whereas perceived as a reason for conflict and enmity, it goes against human nature.²³ Thus, by relating the purpose of diversity to human nature, Ibn Ashur seems to suggest that striving for mutual understanding is a universal human objective. Going further, al-Tabatabai states that in addition to being a purpose of diversity, knowledge of the other is the backbone of society. Consequently, the absence of this objective (knowing the other), according to al-Tabatabai, leads to the decline of society and the destruction of humanity.²⁴

Due to the fundamental importance of knowing the other, Ramadan considers knowledge of the other at the level of specialists alone as inadequate, pointing to, and perhaps more importantly, the need to know one another at the grassroots level.²⁵ Correspondingly, in his comment on verse 49:13, Najar suggests that mutual knowledge, *ta'āruf*, should be understood as a whole process focusing mainly on three aspects, namely solidarity, consultation, and the commandment of what is good.²⁶ In this way, Najar's interpretation of *ta'āruf* seems to clarify Ramadan's thesis. In other words, knowledge of the other taken as solidarity emphasises a grassroots understanding, whereas seen as consultation, it focuses particularly on specialists. As for the commandment of what is good, it could underline the importance of knowing the other at all levels.

Therefore, interpreted in the light of the current civilisational context, the verse reveals new geographical, social as well as psychological dimensions to the objective of knowing the other, *ta'āruf*. In fact, diversity expressed by the verse is seen as a universal source of knowledge psychologically related to human nature and hence to the process of self-understanding in the light of the other.

Overall, analysis of the historical, textual, and current civilisational context of verse 49:13 has shown that the knowledge of the different other is a universal Qur'anic objective. Moreover, in addition to being universal and in accordance with human nature, such an objective constructs the axis of the peacebuilding

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process. For this reason, striving for mutual understanding can be accommodated by the Qur'an as one of the main objectives of normative religious pluralism. Thus, the objective of knowing the other will dispel prejudice, stereotypes, and the desire for superiority and domination, which constitute major barriers to normative religious pluralism, or as Henzell-Thomas advises:

We must purge the mind of prejudice, conditioning, false notions, and unanalysed authority – “Idols of the human mind” which distort and discolour the true nature of things – and rely instead on direct experience, perception, observation, and “true induction” as methods of gaining sound knowledge.²⁷

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Cooperation With the Other in Righteousness and Piety: Mutual Engagement – *Ta'āwun*

In this section another Qur'anic imperative concerning inter-faith relations will be examined as an objective of normative religious pluralism. This is the imperative of cooperation with the other in righteousness and piety. In fact, analysis in the previous section led to the conclusion, that knowledge of the other and hence the realisation of mutual understanding can be regarded as one of the main objectives of religious pluralism in the Qur'an. However, according to the Qur'an, fostering knowledge and mutual understanding among adherents of different religious affiliations should lead to a higher level objective, namely cooperation. The move from knowing the other to cooperation with the other means a move from mere coexistence or interaction to mutual engagement in the process of religious pluralism. Actually, it is the element of engagement that promotes the objective of cooperation to a higher level than mere knowledge of the other.

Yet, an analysis of classical Qur'anic exegesis reveals a number of classical sources to view, it would appear, the issue of

mutual engagement and cooperation as controversial and problematic. These sources claim cooperation with the other to have been abrogated thus leaving cooperation as exclusively restricted to Muslims alone. This being the case, a careful exploration of the Qur'anic text is essential with regards to the issue of cooperation. The most central Qur'anic verse related to this is:

O ye who believe! Violate not the sanctity of the symbols of Allah, nor of the Sacred Month, nor of the animals brought for sacrifice, nor the garlands that mark out such animals, nor the people resorting to the Sacred House, seeking of the bounty and good pleasure of their Lord. But when ye are clear of the Sacred Precincts and of pilgrim garb, ye may hunt and let not the hatred of some people in (once) shutting you out of the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression (and hostility on your part). Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancour: fear Allah, for Allah is strict in punishment. (Qur'an *al-Mā'idah* 5:2)

In general, the verse regulates some aspects of the relationship between Muslims and God as well as between Muslims and other people. After being ordered not to violate the commands of God, believers have been obliged to guarantee the inviolability of animals brought for sacrifice as well as the inviolability of those people peacefully resorting to the Sacred House. In the same way, Muslims have been ordered to cooperate in righteousness and piety with those polytheists who shut them out of the Sacred Mosque during the treaty of *Hudaybiyyah*, instead of taking revenge on them.

Turning next to the issue of abrogation, there exists a claim which asserts verse 5:2 to have been abrogated and substituted by other verses ordering Muslims to fight and slay the polytheists. It would appear that, according to the abrogation claim, the relationship between Muslims and polytheists, is one confined to fighting and mutual destruction only.

To examine this assertion, we need to start with its historical aspect. In this respect, al-Ṭabarī mentions scholars as being

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unanimous in the verse having been abrogated. However, there has been disagreement on whether the whole or only a part of the verse was abrogated.²⁸ For instance, al-Ḍaḥḥāk claims the entire verse to have been abrogated,²⁹ whereas al-Mujāhid asserts that only the garlands made from the Makkan bark part was abrogated for environmental reasons.³⁰ As far as al-Ṭabarī himself is concerned, the part which was abrogated is “nor of the Sacred Month, nor of the animals brought for sacrifice, nor the garlands that mark out such animals, nor the people resorting to the Sacred House” (Qur'an *al-Mā'idah* 5:2).³¹ Regardless of the disagreements, all scholars claiming abrogation agree that the verse was abrogated by the following Qur'anic text:

...fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war);... (Qur'an *al-Tawbah* 9:5)

Although al-Ḍaḥḥāk claims verse 5:2 to have been abrogated by 9:5, it appears that he also contradicts this by stating 9:5 to have been abrogated by the following verse: “...thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom...” (Qur'an *Muḥammad* 47:4).³²

The problem with al-Ḍaḥḥāk is that firstly, the chronological order of surahs, *Muḥammad*-47, *al-Tawbah*-9, and *al-Mā'idah*-5, (as mentioned by al-Zarkashī),³³ does not favor his abrogation claims. Secondly, his assertion that the whole of verse 5:2 had been abrogated would imply, if accepted, that the sanctity of God's commands can be violated. Of course, not one Muslim scholar in history has claimed such a thing.

As for Mujāhid's assertion referring to the garlands made from Makkan bark part having been prohibited on environmental grounds, this also cannot be accepted, because the Qur'anic text does not stipulate that Makkan bark should be used. In fact, garlands would be perceived as recognisable signs emphasising the inviolability of people as well as the animals wearing them. In fact, there is no evidence to support Mujāhid's abrogation claim.

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Al-Ṭabarī states that according to most exegetes, God's commandment to the believers not to violate the sanctity of "the people resorting to the Sacred House, seeking of the bounty and good pleasure of their Lord" (5:2), applied to the polytheists only. However, he further remarks:

There is no doubt that it ["the people resorting to the Sacred House, seeking of the bounty and good pleasure of their Lord"] was abrogated by the verse "fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war)" (9:5), since it would be contradictory to simultaneously command inviolability of the pagans whilst also to fight them. There is a consensus among scholars, that the people of war among the pagans must be fought and slain. Providing that by pagans is meant those of them who are people of war,³⁴ there is no doubt that it [5:2] is abrogated.³⁵

Al-Ṭabarī's statement explicitly shows that his abrogatio conclusion is made with reference to those pagans who are people of war. Thus, it becomes clear that by abrogation, al-Ṭabarī means the act of specifying the general ruling of the verse, but not its substitution. However, such a conclusion failed to calculate the existence of peaceful pagans to whom verse 5:2 refers. Actually, the ambiguous nature of the term abrogation and al-Ṭabarī's own lack in distinguishing between warmongering and peaceful polytheists open the way for speculation and misleading conclusions.

More importantly, there are other scholars who conclude verse 5:2 to be *muḥkam*, that is not subject to abrogation. For instance, al-Zamakhsharī mentions al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī as stating: "There is nothing abrogated in surah *al-Mā'idah*."³⁶ In the same vein, Abū Maysarah states: "There are eighteen obligations, *farīdah*, in surah *al-Mā'idah*, and nothing is abrogated in it."³⁷ Furthermore, al-Zamakhsharī ascribes a hadith to the Prophet, wherein he states:

Surah *al-Mā'idah* is from the last Qur'anic chapters revealed; therefore treat all lawful issues in it as lawful, and all unlawful as unlawful.³⁸

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The content of this particular hadith is narrated by al-Qāsim ibn Salām in his book *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, through the following chain of transmission: “We were told by Abū al-Iamān from Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbdullah ibn Abū Maryam from Ḍumrah ibn Ḥabīb and ʿAṭīyyah ibn Qays, who said: the Prophet – peace be upon him – said...” and then mentions the above hadith.³⁹

However, the chain of transmission contains a gap between Ḍumrah ibn Ḥabīb, ʿAṭīyyah ibn Qays and the Prophet. In other words, there is omission in the chain in terms of the name of a Companion, since both Ḍumrah ibn Ḥabīb⁴⁰ and ʿAṭīyyah ibn Qays⁴¹ were Successors (*tābiʿūn*). Because of this discontinuity, the hadith is defined as *Mursal* (a hadith where the chain only goes up to a Successor) and classified as weak (*ḍaʿīf*). Moreover, one of the narrators, Abū Bakr ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abū Maryam, has been subject to criticism with scholars in the field of hadith unanimous on his weakness as a narrator of *aḥādīth*.⁴² Although this particular hadith is cited by al-Zamakhsharī as evidence for negating abrogation in surah *al-Mā'idah*, it is weak and therefore cannot be accepted. Nevertheless there exists another hadith in which the same meaning is transmitted through another chain of transmitters and which is classified as authentic. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal narrates it as follows:

We were told by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Maḥdī, who said: We were told by Muʿāwiyah from Abū al-Zāhiriyyah, from Jubayr ibn Nufayr who said: “I visited ʿĀ'ishah and she asked me: ‘Do you read surah *al-Mā'idah*?’” He said: “I answered: ‘Yes, I do.’ She said: ‘It was the last surah revealed, therefore whatever lawful matters you find in it, consider them as lawful, and whatever unlawful matters you find in it, consider them as unlawful.’ I also, asked her about the Prophet’s character and she said: ‘His character was the Qur’an.’”⁴³

After careful examination Shuaib al-Arnaut concludes the hadith’s chain of transmission to be authentic and all transmitters trustworthy (*thiqāt*).⁴⁴ The same hadith is also narrated by al-Ḥākim in his *Al-Mustadrak*, wherein he concludes that “the

hadith is authentic and in accordance with the conditions of the Two Shaykhs,⁴⁵ but they did not record it.”⁴⁶ Therefore, taken together, both hadith constitute reliable evidence proving *al-Mā'idah* to have been the last surah revealed. Accordingly, al-Zarkashī's chronological order of Qur'anic chapters, defines *al-Mā'idah* as the last surah revealed. He also remarks that in his Farewell Sermon (during his final Hajj) the Prophet recited from *al-Mā'idah*. After Prophet Muhammad delivered the sermon, the following verses of the Qur'an were revealed:

This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion. (*Al-Mā'idah*, 5:3)⁴⁷

Al-Zarkashī's claim is supported by 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who narrates that once a Jew said to him:

“O the chief of believers! There is a verse in your Holy Book which is read by all of you (Muslims), and had it been revealed to us, we would have taken that day (on which it was revealed as a day of celebration.” 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb asked: “Which is that verse?” The Jew replied: “This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion” (5:3). 'Umar replied: “No doubt, we know when and where this verse was revealed to the Prophet. It was Friday and the Prophet was standing at 'Arafah” (i.e. the Day of Hajj).⁴⁸

Under these circumstances, and given that *al-Mā'idah* was the last surah to have been revealed to the Prophet, any claims of abrogation whether for the surah in general, or more specifically in relation to verse 5:2, are deemed illogical. This conclusion is underscored by the opinions of Abū Muslim al-Isfahānī,⁴⁹ Muhammad Abu Zahrah,⁵⁰ the late Muhammad al-Ghazali⁵¹ and other scholars who see absolutely no case for abrogation in the entire Qur'an.

In sum, as historical analysis has revealed, no authentic evidence exists to support the claim of abrogation for verse 5:2. Furthermore, both the chronological order of surah *al-Mā'idah* as well as an authentic hadith concerning it, constitute decisive

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evidence that the entire content of the surah is not subject to abrogation.

The sentence “Help (*ta'āwanū*) ye one another in righteousness and piety” pertaining to the objective of cooperation is another case in point. This concerns an exclusive restriction in meaning of the scope of the imperative *ta'āwanū*, or cooperate (translated as help by Yusuf Ali). For example, al-Ṭabarī seems to confine this cooperation to believers, stating: “The meaning of ‘and cooperate in righteousness and piety,’ (5:2), is to help – O, believers – each other in righteousness.”⁵² To refute this exclusive meaning we need to examine the textual context and implications of verse 5:2.

In terms of the textual context of the verse, the first thing to note is that from its very beginning the surah inclusively commands the fulfilment of all contracts and obligations: “O ye who believe! Fulfil (all) obligations” (Qur'an *al-Mā'idah* 5:1).

The purpose of the Arabic definite article *al* attached to the word obligations, *al-ʿuqūd*, is to show the inclusivity of all obligations, *istighrāq al-jins*.⁵³ In other words, the grammatical function of the definite article indicates that believers are obliged to fulfil all their contracts and obligations equally with all people. In fact, this is a kind of inclusive cooperation in righteousness.

Note also the textual context of verse 5:5 which mentions the food and chaste women of the People of the Book as being lawful for Muslims. Now, if cooperation had meant an exclusive collaboration between Muslims only, then surely such legislation would have been highly controversial? In fact surah *al-Mā'idah* deals extensively with topics related to the People of the Book, and this together with the title of the surah itself, emphasise the need for an inclusive cooperation based on righteousness and piety.

And in this we cannot, in addition, ignore the overall context of the Qur'an, which also does not support exclusivity of cooperation. This is largely because the Qur'an in many places encourages inclusive cooperation with the other in righteousness. So, for instance, we read in surah *al-Tawbah*:

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If one amongst the Pagans asks thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the Word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge. (Qur'an *al-Tawbah* 9:6)

This verse (revealed in one of the latest Madinan surahs) clearly encourages cooperation with the polytheists in goodness. Therefore, as long as the Islamic concept of cooperation with the other is regulated by righteousness and piety, it seems at the very least, unreasonable to presume that it is limited exclusively to Muslims. Even, according to the Qur'an, the potential result of inclusive cooperation is mutual love:

It may be that Allah will grant love (and friendship) between you and those whom ye (now) hold as enemies. For Allah has power (over all things); And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Qur'an *al-Mumtahinah* 60:7)

Turning next to the textual implications of verse 5:2, we focus on the part directly related to the imperative of cooperation:

...and let not the hatred of some people in (once) shutting you out of the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression (and hostility on your part). Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancour: fear Allah: for Allah is strict in punishment. (Qur'an *al-Mā'idah* 5:2)

The verse refers to a historical conflict which occurred between the polytheists and Muslims in *Hudaybiyyah* when the former prevented the latter, including the Prophet, from visiting the Ka'bah. More particularly, with the aim of preventing Muslims from committing possible transgressions, the verse on the one hand prescribes detachment from the historical context of the conflict, and on the other commands cooperation in righteousness and piety. The two imperatives are joined together through a conjunction known in Arabic grammar as *wāw al-ʿatf* (a particular type of “and”) which indicates a relationship

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between the two orders. In other words, the verse establishes cooperation in an inclusive sense, on an honorable ground detached from the historical conflict. Thus, through the function of the *wāw al-ʿatf* the past is reconciled with the present.⁵⁴

The idea of reconciliation between the past and the present through the channel of inclusive cooperation in righteousness and piety can be deduced from al-Zamakhsharī's comment on the verse. He remarks that to cooperate in righteousness and piety means to forgive, whereas the prohibition of cooperation in sin and rancour means not to take revenge.⁵⁵ It is clear that those who should be forgiven with no revenge taken on them are the polytheists. This in turn implies that cooperation in righteousness and piety, according to the Qur'an, has humanistic dimensions. Furthermore, Ibn Ashur defines the command to cooperate in righteousness and piety as reason (*taʿlīl*) for the prohibition on taking revenge.⁵⁶ We are to bring the good out in each other as human beings. Overall, this means that cooperation in righteousness and piety in itself is a course of ethical action advanced by the Qur'an as a main objective of human relations.

The humanistic dimensions of cooperation in goodness are presented more vividly in al-Qurṭubī's comment on the verse. He points out that "God's prescription of cooperation in righteousness and piety concerns all human beings."⁵⁷ More significantly, in his comment on verse 5:2, Ibn al-Qayim al-Jawziyyah concludes that "the purpose of human relations is cooperation in righteousness and piety... such a purpose comes in accordance with the divine wisdom of creating humans on the basis of perpetual need for mutual help and cooperation."⁵⁸ Hence, in addition to being inclusive, al-Jawziyyah's conclusion also defines the objective of cooperation in righteousness and piety as an unchangeable divine law in this world.

Therefore, both the textual context as well as the textual implications of verse 5:2 prove the scope of the imperative of positive cooperation to be universal, ruling out any exclusive interpretation in this regard.

As far as the civilisational context of today's world is concerned, we have unprecedented proof of the significance of this concept for the peaceful existence of mankind. Universal human cooperation in good works resonates perhaps more deeply than any time before, in an era which is witnessing increasing global integration and need for global sustained peace. So, it might have been one of the reasons why a number of modern exegetes have emphasised the objective of cooperation in righteousness and piety as an irreplaceable principle of society. For example, Rida states that "cooperation is one of the pillars of social guidance in the Qur'an."⁵⁹ Of course, it is a fact that human beings are naturally social creatures, but what Rida may have intended is that humans are naturally oriented towards cooperation in whatever sense, but the Qur'an has guided them to that kind of cooperation which is related to righteousness and piety, and prohibited cooperation in sin and rancour. In this way, righteousness (*birr*), in verse 5:2 is understood in its broadest sense to mean morality towards human beings, including human rights.⁶⁰ On the other hand rancour, or rather aggression (*'udwān*), is understood in its broadest sense as meaning immorality towards humans, i.e. aggression against human life, property, and dignity.⁶¹

Another modern exegete, al-Tabatabai, defines cooperation in righteousness and piety, and non-cooperation in sin and rancour, respectively as "a principle of Islamic religion."⁶² More strikingly, al-Sharawi asserts that: "It is the cooperation in righteousness and piety that makes the faith a universal issue."⁶³ Al-Sharawi's statement is of paramount importance to the process of normative religious pluralism, since it (the statement) establishes the universality of Islam on the basis of inclusive cooperation in righteousness and piety. It is worth noting here the paradox which abrogationists face, that of requiring restriction of cooperation with the "other" whilst simultaneously earnestly calling that "other" to the universality of Islam.

In summary, some classical sources of Qur'anic exegesis regard verse 5:2 as abrogated, whereas others restrict the imperative of righteous cooperation as applicable only to Muslims.

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Such interpretations, on the one hand, have given the impression that Islam is an entirely exclusive religion, whilst on the other have opened ample room for speculation and misleading conclusions. However, as analysis of verse 5:2 has shown, the imperative to cooperate in righteousness and piety is neither subject to abrogation nor to restriction. Thus, the universality of the Qur'anic prescription of cooperating in righteousness and piety can serve as a main objective of normative religious pluralism in terms of mutual engagement in the field of religious commonalities.

[3]

Competing With the Other in Good Works: Mutual Contribution – *Tasābuq*

Previous sections have thus far discussed two main objectives of normative religious pluralism in the Qur'an: knowledge of, and cooperation with, the other. As explained, the former signifies the need for mutual understanding, whereas the latter indicates mutual engagement in the process of religious pluralism.

This section examines a third Qur'anic imperative which is to compete with the other in good works. Constituting an important objective of normative religious pluralism, unlike the previous two, it emphasises the importance of active contribution. Taken as a whole we see in the three objectives a movement of ascent from mere understanding to engagement to active contribution, transforming religious pluralism into a dynamic process.

The objective of competing in good works is derived mainly from two Qur'anic verses:

To each is a goal to which he turns;⁶⁴ then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good. Wheresoever ye are, Allah will bring you together. For Allah hath power over all things. (Qur'an *al-Baqarah* 2:148)

To each among you have We prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His

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plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah. It is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute. (Qur'an *al-Mā'idah* 5:48)

Generally speaking, the meaning of both verses is directed towards the idea that despite the existence of diversity, efforts should be concentrated on vying with one another in good works. In this way, the prescription of competing with the other in the context of diversity can be considered as a significant objective of normative religious pluralism.

However, certain classical Qur'anic exegetes have once again limited the scope of the verse, applying an exclusive meaning to the idea of competing with one another in good works, limiting this understanding to Muslims rather than the whole of humanity. In fact, the exclusive approach predominates in respect of these sources. For example, al-Ṭabarī comments on 2:148:

What God means by His words “then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good” (2:148) is that: [here al-Ṭabarī speaks directly on behalf of God] I explained the truth to you O believers and guided you to the *Qiblah* which Jews and Christians, and all other communities have gone astray from. Therefore, as a token of gratitude to your God, embark on doing righteous deeds...And in order not to go astray as previous communities did, keep your *Qiblah* and do not lose it like they did.⁶⁵

Al-Ṭabarī supports this statement by citing Qatādah according to whom the meaning of “then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good” (2:148), is not to be defeated in respect of your *Qiblah*.⁶⁶

Yet at the same time some of these classical assumptions are shown to be inconsistent with regards to claims for exclusivity. For instance, while in 2:148 al-Ṭabarī confines competing in good works to Muslims only, in 5:48 he apparently lifts the restriction to include all people. This is understood from the context of his comment on 5:48, and more clearly from the usage of the general word *nās* (people). According to al-Ṭabarī the meaning of “so strive as in a race in all virtues” (5:48), is to be

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understood as “embark – O people⁶⁷ – on doing righteous deeds and seeking closeness to your God.”⁶⁸

Inconsistency again appears in Ibn Ashur's comments on the two verses. In relation to 2:148 he appears to take a highly exclusive position stating the imperative of competing in good works to be directed to Muslims only. This in order not to involve them in any debate with the People of the Book over the *Qiblah*, but rather to concentrate their efforts on resolving the problems of Muslim society.⁶⁹ In contrast he suddenly becomes inclusive when it comes to 5:48, regarding the statement of diversity and endorsement to compete in all virtues stipulated in the verse as applicable to all humanity. He explains that diversity is the result of man's freedom of choice endowed by God to all humanity. Thus the wisdom in man's competing with one another in good works is to realise truth in knowledge, morals, and belief.⁷⁰

Therefore, what we have in these explanations of the two verses from the exegetical sources is absolute exclusivism or unsystematic inclusivism, which fail to emphasise the Qur'an's prescription to compete in good works as being a universal objective of human relations. To prove this latter point we need to first examine the textual context in which the verses exist. In this respect, it should be noted that both surahs *al-Baqarah* and *al-Mā'idah* are Madinan, meaning that the verses were revealed in a diverse society. This makes it more likely that the purpose of the verses was to recognise diversity as a matter of earthly fact and to construct out of it a universal objective, rather than create a homogeneous society.

In fact, the textual context of both verses appears to favor the universality of the objective to compete in good works. Looking at verse 2:148, we see how diversity as a matter of earthly fact is confirmed through the discussion on the *Qiblah*. The Qur'an states that no one religious community will ever follow the *Qiblah* of the other. This is because, “to each is a goal, *wijhah*, to which he turns” (2:148). According to Ibn Ashur, *wijhah* means “a way of thinking,”⁷¹ while al-Sharawi clarifies that the meaning of *wijhah* is based on the freedom of choice.⁷² Therefore, in

this textual context, the verse implies that human cognitive systems are different, but regardless of the fact, there should be a common objective of competing in good works (*fastabiqū al-khayrāt*).

With regard to verse 5:48, there is no disagreement on its occurring in the textual context of discussion on the three divine revelations of the Torah, Gospel, and the Qur'an. For this reason al-Rāzī states that “to each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way”, addresses the Jews, Christians, and the Muslims.⁷³ Moreover, the verse explicitly points to diversity as an undeniable fact of this life: “If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues” (5:48). Therefore, the historical as well as textual context of both verses serves to justify the argument that the verses construct out of diversity an inclusive objective to compete in good works.

The sentence “so strive together as in a race in all virtues (*fastabiqū al-khayrāt*)” (2:148, 5:48) is an imperative with the Arabic verb *fastabiqū* being mainly translated into English as “strive together as in a race” and also “vie with one another, or simply race.” Yet what is the precise meaning of *fastabiqū*? It is important to look into the Qur'anic usage of the word, the most relevant being traced in surah *Yūsuf*: “So they both raced each other to the door” (Qur'an *Yūsuf* 12:25)

The verse illustrates a dynamic incident in which Joseph and the 'Azīz's⁷⁴ wife race to reach a door which the wife had locked. Each had a different reason to get there first. Hers was an attempt to seduce him, whilst his was to escape the room. The race therefore was not based on a common purpose.

In another part of surah *Yūsuf*, the word *istabaq* is mentioned: “We went racing with one another” (Qur'an *Yūsuf* 12:17). But here, instead of dynamic action as in 12:25, the word *nastabiq* in the verse is understood to mean proof of excellence among people in a certain activity.⁷⁵

Therefore, the Qur'anic usage of the word *istabaq* shows it to have connotations of dynamic action (whose aim can be positive

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or negative) as well as meaning proof of excellence among a group of people in a certain activity.

Under these circumstances, the imperative “*fastabiqū al-khayrāt*,” “so strive together as in a race in all virtues” (2:148, 5:48) can be understood to mean both realising the objective of active and dynamic contribution and also excelling in our action to achieve our objectives to the best of our ability (note so long as this competition is towards virtuous goals). And this applies to the process of normative religious pluralism. Since a race can be used for achieving positive and negative purposes, the Qur'an limits the act of competing only to noble and righteous goals whilst it disapproves of any kind of competing in sin, transgression, or any evil purpose:

Many of them dost thou see, racing each other in sin and transgression, and their eating of things forbidden. Evil indeed are the things that they do.
(Qur'an *al-Mā'idah* 5:62)

In fact, this combining of notions of competition with goodness in the Qur'an gears the process of normative religious pluralism towards servicing a noble and humanitarian objective whilst preventing it from serving nefarious ends. In this respect, reflecting on verse 5:48, the Christian theologian Grodz remarks critically that:

The notion of vying or competing combined with goodness is inappropriate in the contemporary Western world where these terms have recently become more often associated with a ruthless way of attaining one's own goals. In an approach like that, other people are basically treated as object-ivals, opponents or, at worst, enemies. Thus, they become an obstacle rather than a source of inspiration.⁷⁶

Another meaning which can be derived from “*fastabiqū al-khayrāt*” is to strive with one another for moral and spiritual development, which in turn positively affects all other aspects of daily life. Needless to say, in the context of today's world so vital is the need for moral and spiritual growth that all religions are in

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agreement as to its urgent development and advancement. Once again, it is worth quoting a Christian viewpoint on this meaning of “*fastabiqū al-khayrāt*”. Thus according to Grodz:

In my understanding, ‘vying in good works’ implies some sort of noble competition that inspires and encourages people to do what is good. There is space for sincerity and authenticity, but not for pretence. ‘Vying in good works’ also means striving for spiritual development in a way that does not apply any pressure on others to accept someone else’s point of view and convictions, but at the same time gives an opportunity to present unobtrusively the spiritual wealth of one’s religion to followers of other religions, and to draw creatively on the wealth of other traditions.⁷⁷

In summary, the Qur’anic prescription of competing in good works is limited exclusively to, in most exegetical sources, Muslims or at least not systematically emphasised as a universal objective of human relations. However, examination of the Qur’anic textual as well as overall context, as well as today’s civilisational context, reveals the imperative to compete in good works to be a universal Qur’anic order. Thus, emerging from a textual context discussing religious particularities, the Qur’anic imperative to compete positively in all virtues in actual fact encourages humanity to energise and make a healthy and active contribution leading to the emergence of excellence and development in society. In this sense, the Qur’anic universal prescription of competing in good works forms one of the main objectives of normative religious pluralism.

[4]

Mutual Support – *Tadāfu*^c

Another main objective of normative religious pluralism that the Qur’an recognises is a mutual support between religions. Compared to the previous three objectives of religious pluralism, that is, mutual understanding, cooperation, and contribution, the objective of mutual support creates a real test for religious co-existence. How can religiously committed people express

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support for religions different from theirs? In this respect, the Qur'an points out that the objective of mutual support between religions concerns mainly the protection of religious freedom, which is the most important foundation of religious pluralism. Secondly, it concerns the issue of repelling any oppression and aggression on earth.

To further elaborate on this statement regarding the objective of mutual support, we need to explore Qur'anic verses relevant to the issue of interfaith support. In this regard, the most central verses discussing the issue occur in surah *al-Hajj*:

To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged; – and verily, Allah is most powerful for their aid; – (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, – (for no cause) except that they say, “our Lord is Allah”. Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid his (cause); – for verily Allah is full of Strength, Exalted in Might, (able to enforce His Will). (Qur'an *al-Hajj* 22:39-40)

Generally speaking, the verses define oppression and especially the restriction of religious freedom as the main reason for permission to use physical self-defence. The verses also point out that lack of self-defence against oppression inescapably leads to overwhelming corruption destroying religions.⁷⁸

Yet, restriction of the scope of these two verses as well as the cause (oppression and restriction of religious freedom) of the implied mutual support has led a number of Qur'anic exegesis sources to once again interpret them exclusively. For example, in his interpretation of “Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another”, al-Zamakhsharī divides the set of people into Muslims and unbelievers, and states that if God had not repelled unbelievers with Muslims, the polytheists would have destroyed the holy places of all religions.⁷⁹ Similarly, al-Rāzī comments on this part of the verse that “God gives permission for the followers of His religion to fight unbelievers.”⁸⁰ Even

Tantawi with respect to the verse goes on to confine the law of mutual support (*tadāfuʿ*) to the issue of belief and unbelief.⁸¹

It seems that a large number of Qurʾanic exegetes, influenced by certain methodological perceptions and particular historical events, have limited the scope of mutual support to certain ideological boundaries and thus reduced the universality of the Qurʾanic objective to an exclusive aim pertaining to one particular group of people. Given this, we need to explore the historical, textual, and thematic implications of the verses in order to challenge this exclusive claim.

With regards to historical context no authentic occasion of revelation has been narrated in relation to the verses. However, what is explicitly clear from the content of *al-Ḥajj* is that the surah is a Madinan one. Correspondingly, in the chronological order of the revelation of the surahs set by al-Zarkashī, he recognizes *al-Ḥajj* to be a Madinan surah.⁸² Another point to historically consider is that, according to al-Ṭabarī, those who were expelled from their homes without any rights were Muslims suffering religious persecution at the hands of the Makkān polytheists. Consequently, it was religious persecution which led to the *Hijrah* (Muslim migration from Makkah to Madinah).⁸³

Putting these two points together (*al-Ḥajj* being a Madinan surah and the issue of religious persecution in Makkah), what we can deduce is that verses 22:39-40 were revealed at the very early stage of Madinan society, or shortly after the migration (*Hijrah*). In other words the permission to fight in self-defence (revealed in the passive voice “*yuqātalūn,*”) against the religious persecution of the Makkans, was revealed in the multicultural society of Madinah which had offered asylum to the Muslims. An important implication of this revelation in the multicultural setting of Madinah – and the absence of such revelation in the homogeneous society of Makkah – is that to repel oppression requires a united front, that is inclusive mutual support between religions. So, this might have been the reason for the Prophet’s establishment of the Constitution of Madinah shortly after his arrival in

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the city, through which he realized in actuality and thereby practically the objective of mutual support by uniting all religious groups on the basis of protecting human rights and repelling oppression.

In fact, implications for the inclusivity of mutual support between religions can be traced back even earlier to Makkah. It is a well-known fact that the Prophet sought support from the Christians in Abyssinia, and also historical fact that he turned to the Christian scholar Waraqah for advice as well as support as explicitly underlined in Waraqah's answer offering the Prophet support:

Anyone who came with something similar to what you [Muhammad] have brought was treated with hostility; if I should remain alive till the day when you will be turned out [by your people] then I would support you strongly.⁸⁴

Turning to the textual meaning of verses 22:39-40, we try to uncover the real reason for the permission given to fight oppression and religious persecution. This was not an ideological point of view. For this reason, al-Ṭabarī states that the meaning of "Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another", should be understood in its broadest sense to include all people, since God has not provided any indication for the restriction of the meaning.⁸⁵ Furthermore, al-Sharawi makes it clear that the verse concerns all of humanity, and cannot be restricted to the classification of believers and unbelievers. More explicitly, he states that the verse is related to the issue of oppression at every time and every place.⁸⁶ Therefore, with the purpose of protecting religious freedom and repelling oppression, God has enabled people to unite themselves in order to protect their rights. For this reason, the Qur'an stipulates that "if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another" (Asad, Qur'an 22:40), there would have been destruction in terms of religion.

Actually, by mentioning the threat of monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques being destroyed together in the

context of religious persecution, the Qur'an underlines the importance of mutual support among religions against oppression. Moreover, according to al-Tabatabai, this threat of destruction is not restricted to the physical aspects of the places of worship, but also to the entire religion.⁸⁷ Thus increasing the responsibility of faiths to act inclusively, working on a united front to support one another in repelling oppression and protecting religious freedom.

So, protection of religious freedom requires religiously inclusive support. If religions fail to do this they jeopardise not only their own existence, but also the meaningful existence of all humanity. This fact is stressed by the Qur'an in the context of the Children of Israel and their oppression and fight to gain their religious freedom.⁸⁸ After the oppression is successfully repelled, the Qur'an concludes that "...And if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, corruption would surely overwhelm the earth" (Asad, Qur'an 2:251).

The objective of mutual support between religions, therefore, concerns the protection of religion and thus the protection of human life from any kind of corruption. According to Abu Zahrah, the protection of religion in the context of Islam means protection of any religion, even the religion of Zoroastrianism, since religiosity is what distinguishes human beings from other creatures. In this respect, the protection of religion is perceived as the protection of the holiest meaning of human life.⁸⁹

The inclusivity of the objective of mutual support is also underscored by the textual context of the surah *al-Hajj*, where the humanistic approach seems to be the main feature of the surah. Surah *al-Hajj* consists of 78 verses in which the general word "people" (*nās*) is mentioned fifteen times. More strikingly, the surah begins by addressing all people "O Mankind" and ends (with regards to the last part of the content, i.e. the last page) by addressing all people.

In the context of today's world, mutual support between differing faiths has become without doubt one of the main objectives of a large number of international events and organisations.

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And this development is vital given an increasingly volatile climate in which initiatives for burning and bombing religious temples, attempts to burn religious scripture, and easy insulting of holy prophets, has put faiths and those who profess them in danger. It is of paramount importance therefore that all religions work together in a climate of mutual support not competition against such aggression.

In sum analysis has shown that the claim of limiting mutual support exclusively to Muslims is based on classical opinion only and not underpinned by any compelling argument. What we do discover through an exegetical examination of verses 22:39-49 (using a systematic methodology) however, is that implementation of this mutual support does not depend on a specific belief system or ideology. In fact, the scope of the Qur'anic objective covers universally all parties protecting religious freedom and repelling any kind of oppression. For this reason, the universality of mutual support between religions in the context of diversity can be accommodated by the Qur'an as one of the main objectives of normative religious pluralism.

[5]

Conclusion

Some sources of Qur'anic exegesis have limited the universal objectives of the human relationship exclusively to Muslims, whereas other sources have been inconsistent in this regard. In addition to the specific historical circumstances in which they wrote and which could have influenced their interpretation, the failure of these sources to recognise systematically the universality of a number of common human objectives seems also to have emerged largely from an absence of a holistic thematic approach to the Qur'an. Having applied the holistic thematic approach in this chapter, we discover that the Qur'an universally endorses four main objectives of the human relationship, which in ascending order are:

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- a) Mutual understanding – *ta^ʿāruḥ*
- b) Mutual engagement – *ta^ʿāwun*
- c) Mutual contribution – *istibāq al-khayrāt*
- d) Mutual support – *tadāfu^ʿ*

Note all four objectives are mentioned in Madinan surahs. In other words in a multicultural society. They are also mentioned in the textual context of religious diversity making them serve as main targets of normative religious pluralism. This wider more inclusive understanding immediately forms the basis, or axis, for a peacebuilding process, wherein achieving universal righteousness and excellence in the context of diversity is seen as the final goal of normative religious pluralism.